

Testimony of Mourning Parents Act, Inc.

Presented by Sherry Chapman, President

Transportation Committee Public Hearing

February 14, 2011

**In Opposition of HB 6122: an act authorizing newly-licensed drivers to carry
siblings as passengers**

Chairman Guerrero, Chairman Maynard, members of the Committee. My name is Sherry Chapman. I am a founder and president of Mourning Parents Act, Inc., also known as IMPACT, a non-profit organization of volunteers whose mission is to eliminate tragedies caused by inexperienced drivers through awareness, education and legislation. I am here to speak in opposition of proposed house bill number 6122: an act authorizing newly-licensed drivers to carry siblings as passengers.

IMPACT was formed by family members of three teens killed in separate car crashes in CT within an 11-day period in December of 2002. Since then, our membership has grown in direct proportion to the number of horrific motor vehicle crashes you have heard about in the news. We started as three moms. Now the face of IMPACT is made up of a broad coalition of families, friends and community members representing innumerable crashes involving teen drivers in CT. We also have among our membership victim survivors and surviving drivers of crashes which resulted in teen deaths.

Motor vehicle crashes are the number 1 killer of teenagers in America, accounting for more than one third of all deaths among 15-19 year olds. Many of these deaths are preventable.

In order to protect its young drivers (and you and I who share the roads with them), Connecticut enacted certain graduated driver licensing laws, known as GDL laws. The most robust of these laws were passed in 2008. The laws require increased education and training, and introduce the novice driver to the driving experience in a

gradual and controlled manner. The laws are tied directly to the risk factors involving teen driving.

The current GDL program in Connecticut prohibits siblings from riding in a car with a newly-licensed teen for the first 6 months after licensure. Why?

- Because crash rates are highest during the first year a teen is licensed.
- Because per mile driven, teens are about 4 times more likely to crash than other age groups.ⁱ
- Because studies have shown the fatal crash risk doubles when a 16 or 17-year-old driver has one passenger in the vehicle.
- Because with two or more passengers the crash rate is multiplied by five.ⁱⁱ
- Because the injury risk of a child passenger traveling with a sibling teen driver is 1.5 times higher than when traveling with adults.ⁱⁱⁱ

The bottom line? Kids are more at risk of being injured or killed when they ride with inexperienced teen drivers. The law is in place to protect, not punish.

Restrictions on sibling passengers may cause some inconvenience for parents. Inconvenience should not trump risk. Our IMPACT family is acutely aware of the risk.

These are some of the faces of our IMPACT children. This is my son Ryan. My only son. Ryan's death resulting from a car crash was incredibly violent and sudden, though he fought very hard to live and survived for a few hours. Even after eight years, our family is still trying to work through the devastation. But I count my blessings. Because unlike one of our other IMPACT members, I did not lose both of my children in a single motor vehicle accident. Unlike another of our IMPACT members, my living child was not driving the vehicle my son was riding in when it crashed. I have a child who is still living.

Our members reside in your congressional districts. We present our safe teen driving program for free in the high schools of the cities and towns that you serve. We work very hard to educate teens and parents and raise awareness on teen driving safety issues throughout the state.

CT has a very robust GDL program. One to be proud of. If we weaken or dilute it, we do so at the risk of harming those we have a duty to protect.

Chairman Guerrero, Chairman Maynard, Committee members. IMPACT urges you to reject House Bill 6122. Thank you.

ⁱ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Fatality facts: Teenagers 2008. Arlington (VA): The Institute; 2009. Available from URL: www.iihs.org/research/fatality_facts_2008/teenagers.htm

ⁱⁱ Fact Sheet by Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety on Graduated Driver Licensing and Teen Drivers: Passenger Restrictions. (Included with prior testimony)

ⁱⁱⁱ Study conducted by the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, 2007. (Included with prior testimony)